

A Plain Account of the Persecution, now laid to the Charge of the Church of ENGLAND.

THE desire of *Liberty* to serve God in that way and manner, which Men judge to be most acceptable to him, is so Natural and Reasonable, that they cannot but be extremely provoked against those who would force them to serve him in any other. But the conceit withall, which most men have that their way of serving God is the only acceptable way; naturally inclines them, when they have Power, to use all means to constrain all others to serve him in that way only. So that *Liberty* is not more desired by all, at one time, than it is denied by the very same Persons at another. Put them into different Conditions, and they are not of the same mind: but have different Inclinations, in one state, from what they have in another. As will be apparent by a short view of what hath passed in these Churches and Kingdoms, within our memory.

II. Before the late Civil Wars there were very grievous Complaints made of the *Bishops*; that they pressed the Ceremonies so strictly, as to inflict heavy Censures upon those called *Puritans*, who could not in conscience conform to them. Now no sooner had those very Persons who thus complain'd, got their liberty to do as they pleased, but they took it quite away from the other: and Sequestred all those who would not enter into their *Holy League and Covenant*; for the Reforming all things, according to the Modell which they propounded. Nay, they were not willing to bear with *Five* Dissenting Brethren among themselves; who could not Conform to the *Presbyterial* Government. And when these Dissenting Brethren, commonly known by the Name of *Independents*, had got a Party strong enough, which carried all before them; they would not allow the use of the *Common Prayer* in any Parish; no not to the King himself in his own Chapel: not grant to one of the old Clergy, so much liberty as to teach in a School, &c. Which things I do not mention (God knows) to reproach those who were guilty of them; but only to put them in mind of their own Failings: that they may be humbled for them, and not insult over the Church of England, nor severely upbraid them with that, which when time was, they acted with a higher hand themselves. If I should report all that the *Presbyterians* did here and in Scotland, and all that the *Independents* did here and in New-England; it would not be thought that I exceed the Truth, when I say they have been more guilty of this fault, than those whom they now charge with it. Which doth not excuse the Church of England, it must be confessed; but doth in some measure, mitigate her fault. For the Conformable

Clergy having met with such very hard usage in that dismal time, wherein many of them were oppressed above measure: no wonder if the smart of it, then fresh in their minds, something imbittered their spirits; when God was pleased, by a wonderful Revolution, to put them into Power again.

III. Then a stricter *Act of Uniformity* was made, and several Laws pursuant to it, for the enforcing that Uniformity, by severe Penalties. But let it be remembered that none were by those Laws constrained to come Church; but had *Liberty* left them to serve God at home (and some Company with them) in their own way. And let it be farther remembered, that the reason why they were denied their liberty of meeting in greater Assemblies was; because such Assemblies were represented as greatly endangering the publick Peace and Safety: as the words are in the very first Act of this nature against *Quakers*, in the Year 1662. Let any one read the *Oxford Act*, (as it is commonly called) made in the Year 1665, and that at *Westminster* in the Year 1670: and he will find them intended against *Seditious Conventicles*; That is, they who made them were perswaded by the *Jesuit interest* at first to look upon such Meetings as *Nurseries of Sedition*, where bad Principles were infused into mens minds, destructive to the Civil Government. If it had not been for this, it doth not appear that the Contrivers of these Laws were inclined to such Severities as were thereby enacted; but the *Nonconformists* might have enjoyed a larger liberty in Religion. It was not Religion alone which was considered, and pretended, but the publick peace and settlement: with respect to which they were tyed up so straitly in the exercise of their Religion. Which, to deal clearly, I do not believe would have taught *Rebellion*, but this was constantly insinuated by the Court Agents; and it is no wonder if the Parliament who remembered how the Ministers of that Persuasion (Though indeed from the then appearance of *Papery*) had been the principal Incouragers of that *Defensive War* against the King, were easily made to believe that they still retained the same principles, and would propagate them, if they were suffered, among the People. Certain it is also, that the Court made it their care to have those Acts passed; though at the same time they hindered their execution: that they might keep up both Parties, in the height of their Animosities; and especially that they might make the Church of England, be both, hated and despised by the *Dissenters*.

IV. Thus things continued for some time, till wise men began to see into the Secret; and think of

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a. Reconciliation: But it was always hindred by the *Court*: who never thought of giving *Liberty* by a *Law*, but only by the *Prerogative*; which could as easily take it away. There was a time, for instance, when a *Comprehension*, &c. was projected by several Great Men both in *Church and State*: for the taking as many as was possible into Union with us; and providing Ease for the rest. Which so nettled the late King, that meeting with the then Archbishop of *Canterbury*, he said to him (as I perfectly remember) *What, My Lord, you are for a Comprehension?* To which he making such a reply as signified, he heard some were about it: No, said the King, *I will keep the Church of England pure and unmixed*: that is, never suffer a Reconciliation with the *Dissenters*. And when the *Lords and Commons* also had, not many years ago, passed a Bill for the repealing of the most heavy of all the *Penal Laws* against *Dissenters*, viz. the Statute of 35 *Eliz.* 1. (which, by the Parliament is made, against the *Wicked and dangerous practices of Seditious Sectaries, and disloyal persons*;) his late Majesty so dealt with the Clerk of the Parliament, that it was shuffled away and could not be found; when it was to have been presented to him, among other Bills, for his Royal Consent unto it. A notable token of the abhorrence the Court then had of all *Penal Laws*; and of their great kindness to *Dissenters*.

V. Who may remember, if they please, that as once there was a time, when the Court turned out, or chid, those *Justices*, who were forward in the Execution of the Laws against *Nonconformists*; because they were then in so low a Condition, that the Court was afraid the Church of England might indeed be established in its Uniformity. So when the *Nonconformists* were, by some liberty, grown stronger, and set themselves against the Court Interest, in the Election of *Sheriffs*, and such like things; then all those *Justices* were turned out who hung back, and would not execute the Laws against them; and *Justices* pickt out for the purpose, who would do it severely. Nay, the Clergy were called upon, and had Orders sent them, to return the Names of all *Nonconformists* in their several Parishes; that they might be proceeded against in the Courts Ecclesiastical. And here I cannot forget the Order made by the *Middlesex Justices*, at the Sessions at *Hicks-Hall*, Jan. 13 1681. where they urge the Execution of the Act of 22 *C.2.* against *Conventicles*, because in all probability they will destroy both Church and State. This was the reason which moved them to call upon *Constables* and all other *Officers* to do their duty in this matter: Nay, to call upon the B. of London himself, that he would use his utmost endeavours, within his Jurisdiction, that all such persons may be *Excommunicate*. This was a bold stroke, proceeding from an un-

usual degree of Zeal: which plainly enough signifies that the *Bishops* were not so forward as the *Justices*, in the prosecuting of *Dissenters*. Who may do well to remember that the *House of Commons*, a little before this, had been so kind to them, that those *Justices* would not have dared to have been so severe as they were at *Hicks-Hall*, if they had not been set on by directions from *Whitehall*. For in their Order they press the Execution of the Statute *Eliz.* and 3 *Jac.* 1. for levying Twelve-pence a Sunday upon all those that do not come to Church: Whereas the *House of Commons*, Nov. 6. 1680. had, *Resolved*, *Nemine contra dicente, that it is the Opinion of this House, That the Acts of Parliament made in the Reign of Q. Elizabeth, and King James, against Popish Recusants, ought not to be extended against Protestant Dissenters.*

VI. Who should not forget how backward the Clergy of London especially, were to comply with this design, of reviving the Execution of the Laws against them; what courses they took to save them from this danger! and what hatred they incurred for being so kind to them! Which in truth was kindness to themselves; for now they saw plainly enough that Nothing was intended but the destruction of us both, by setting us, in our turns, one against the other. Many indeed were possessed with the old Opinion, that the *Dissenters* aimed at the overthrow of the Government both in Church and State: which made them the more readily join with those who were employed to suppress them, by turning the edge of the Laws upon them. But both these were most indifferently promoted by the Court: Who laboured might and main to have this believed, that they who were called *Whigs*, intended the ruine of the Church and of the Monarchy too: and therefore none had the Court favour, but they alone who were for the ruining of them. All others were frowned upon, and branded with the name of *Trimmers*; who they adventured at last, to say were worse than *Whigs*. Merely because they, seeing through the design, desired those ugly Names of *Whig* and *Tory* might be laid aside; and perswaded all to Moderation, Love, Unity, and Peace. If any man had these dangerous words in his mouth, he had a mark set upon him; and was looked upon as an enemy, as soon as he discovered any desires of Reconciliation. No peace with *Dissenters* was then as much in some mens mouths, as no peace with Rome had been in others. They were all voted to destruction; and it was an unpardonable crime so much as to mention an Accommodation.

Such things as these ought not to be forgotten.

VII. But if they list not to call them to mind, (tho' they be of fresh memory) yet let them at least consider what they have had at their Tongues end, ever since they knew

knew any thing: That the Church of Rome is a persecuting Church, and the Mother of Persecution. Will they then be deluded by the present Sham of Liberty of Conscience; which they of that Church pretend to give? It is not in their power, no more than in their Spirit: They neither will nor can give liberty of Conscience; but with a delign to take all liberty from us. That Church must be obeyed; and there is no middle choice among them, between turn or burn, conform or be undone. What Liberty do they give in any Country, where their power is established? What Liberty can they give, who have determined that Hereticks ought to be rooted out? Look into France (with which we have had the strictest Alliance & Friendship a long time) and behold, how at this moment they compel those to go to Mass; who they know abhor it as an abominable Idolatry. Such a violent Spirit now acts them, that they stick not to profane their own most holy Mysteries; that they may have the face of an Universal Conformity, without the least Liberty. For the new Converts, as they are called, poor Wretches, are known to be mere outward Complaisers: in their Hearts abominating that which they are forced externally to worship. They declare as much by escaping from this Tyranny over their Consciences, and bewailing their sinful compliance; whensoever they have an opportunity. And they that cannot escape, frequently protest they have been constrained to adore that, which they believe ought not to be adored. And when they come to dye, refuse to receive the Romish Sacrament; and thereupon are dragg'd, when dead, along the Streets, and thrown, like dead Dogs upon the Dunhills. Unto what a height of rage are the spirits of the Romish Clergy inflamed; that it perfectly blinds their eyes, and will not let them see how they expose the most sacred thing in all their Religion (the Holy Sacrament, which they believe to be Jesus Christ himself) to be received by those who they know have no reverence at all for it, but utterly abhor it? For they force them, by all manner of violence, to adore the Host against their will, and then to eat what they have adored; tho' they have the greatest reason to believe, that those poor Creatures do not adore it. That is, the Church of Rome will have her Mysteries adored by all, tho' it be by Hypocrites. None shall be excused, but whether they believe or not believe, they shall be compelled to do as that Church doth. Nothing shall hinder it; for the hatred and fury wherewith they are now transported; is so exceeding great; that it makes them (as I have said) offer violence even to their own Religion, rather than suffer any body not to conform to it.

VIII. And assure your selves they are very desirous to extend this Violence beyond the bounds of France. They would fain see England also, in the same condition. The Bishop of Valence and Die, hath told us as much, in the speech which he made to the French King, in the Name

of the Clergy of France, to Congratulate his glorious Achievements, in rooting out the Heresie of Calvin. In which he hath a most memorable Passage, for which we are beholden to him, because it informs us, that they are not satisfied with what their King hath done there; but would have him think there is a further Glory reserved for him, of lending his help to make us such good Catholics, as he hath made in France. This is the blessed Work they would be at: and if any among us be still so blind as not to see it, we must look upon it as the just judgment of God upon them for some other sins which they have committed. They are delivered up to a Reprobate mind, which cannot discern the most evident things. They declare to all the World that they have been above fifty years, crying out against they know not what. For they know not what Popery is (of which they have seemed to be horribly afraid) if they believe that they of that Religion either can or will give any Liberty; when they have power to Establish their Tyranny. It is no better: St. John himself hath described that Church under the Name of Babylon, that cruel City; and of a BEAST, which like a Bear, tramples all under its feet; and of another Beast, which causes as many as will not worship the Image of the Beast, to be killed; and that no man may buy or sell save such as have had his mark; i. e. are of his Religion, Rev. 13. 1. 15, 16. This Character they will make good to the very end of their Reign, as they have fulfilled it from the beginning. They cannot alter their nature, no more than the Ethiopian change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots. It ever was, since the rise of the BEAST, & it ever will be till its fall, a bloody Church. Which can bear no contradiction to her Doctrine and Orders, but will endeavour to root out all those that oppose her, from the face of the Earth. Witness the Barbarous Crusades against the poor Albigenes in France: in one of which alone Belzermine himself saith, and not without Triumph, there were killed no less than an hundred thousand. Witness the horrible butcheries committed in France, in England, & in the Low-Countries in the Age before us; and in Poland, the Valleys of Piedmont, & in Ireland in this Age; upon those who had no other fault but this, that they made the Holy Scriptures, and not the Roman Church, the Rule of their faith.

IX. But if you be Ignorant of what hath been done, & is doing abroad, yet I hope you observe what they do here at home. What do you think of the Declaration which was very lately imposed to be read in all our Churches? Which when several Bishops and their Clergy, most humbly represented, they could not in Conscience publish to the people in time of Divine Service; this would not excuse them; their Petition was received with indignation, and looked upon as a Libel; the Bishops were prosecuted for it; and Inquiry

is now ordered to be made after those who did not read it (as well as those that did) that they may be punished by the High Commissioners. Call you this Liberty of Conscience? Or do you imagine you shall never have any thing imposed upon you, to be read in your Congregations, which you cannot comply withall? Consider, I beseech you, what will become of you when that time shall come? What's the meaning of this, that ever they are lookt upon as Offenders, for following their Conscience, whose services have been acknowledged to be so great, that they should never be forgotten? It ought to teach Dissenters what they are to expect hereafter, when they have served them so far, (by taking off the Tests and the Penal Laws) as to enable them with safety to remember all their former pretended transgressions. Let them assure themselves the services of the Church of England are not now more certainly forgotten, than the Sins of Dissenters will hereafter, when they have got power to punish them, be most certainly remembered. Be not drawn in then by deceitful words, to help forward your own destruction. If you will not be assistant to it, they cannot do it alone: and it will be very strange if you be persuaded to lend them your help, when the deceit is so apparent. For what are all the present pleas for Liberty, but so many infamous Libels upon the Roman Church, which denies all men this Liberty? While they declaim so laudly against Persecution, they most notoriously reproach Popery; which subsists by Nothing but deceit and cruelty. And who can think that they would suffer their Church to be so exposed and reviled, as it is by such discourses, but with a design to cheat heedless people into its obedience? For this end they can hear it proved, nay prove it themselves to be an Antichristian Church; when they prove it is against Christianity, nay against the Law of Nature and Common reason, to trouble any body for his opinion in Religion.

Once more then I beseech you, be not deceived by good words, if you love your Liberty, and your Life. Call to mind how our poor Brethren in France were very lately deluded by the repeated Protestations which their King made, he would observe the Edict of Nantes (which was the foundation of their Liberty) even then, when he was about to overthrow it: & by many assurances, which were given them by those who came to torment them, that the King intended to reform the Church of France, as soon as he had united his Subjects. What he had done already against the Court of Rome, they told them was an instance of it; and they should shortly see other matters. Such ensnaring words they heard there daily from the mouths of their armed Persecutors, who were ready to fall upon them, or had begun to oppress them: And therefore they would be arrant fools here, if they did not give good words, when they have no power to hurt us. But we shall be far greater fools if we believe they will keep their word when they have got that power; the greatest of all fools if we give them that power. They have no other way but this, to wheedle us out of our Laws and Liberties. Do but surrender the one,

I mean our Laws; and they will soon take away the other, our beloved Liberties. Be not tempted to make such a dangerous Experiment: but let the Laws stand as they are, because they are against them (as appears by their earnest endeavours to repeal them) and be not used as tools to take them away, because they have been grievous to you. They never can be so again For can they who now Court you have the face to turn them again upon you, after they have made all this noise for Liberty? And the Church of England, you may be assured, will not any more trouble you: but when a Protestant Prince shall come, will joyn in the healing of all our breaches; by removing all things out of the way, which have long hindered that blessed work. They cannot meet together in a body to give you this assurance (how should they without the Kings authority so to do?) but every particular person that I have discoursed withall, which are not a few (& you your selves would do well to ask them, when you meet them) profess that they see an absolute necessity of making an end of these Differences that have almost undone us: and will no longer contend to bring all men to one Uniformity; but promote an Uniform Liberty. Do not imagine I intend to give mere words: I mean honestly; such a regular Liberty, as will be the beauty and honour, not the blot and discredit of our Religion. To such a temper the Archbishop of Canterbury, with several other Bishops of his Province, and their Clergy, have openly declared they are willing to come. And the Bishops and Clergy of the Church of England have never been known to act deceitfully. Our Religion will not at any time allow them to equivocate; nor to give good words without meaning. Much less at such a time as this when our Religion is in great danger; and we have nothing to trust unto, but Gods protection of sincere Persons. Let Integrity and Uprightness preserve us, is their constant Prayer. They can hope for no help from Heaven, if they should prevaricate with men. God they know would desert them, if they should go about to delude their Brethren. And they are so void of common sense, as to adventure to incur his most high displeasure, when they have nothing to rely upon but his favour.

In short, Trust to those who own you for their Brethren, as you do them: for tho' they have been angry Brethren, yet there is hope of Reconciliation between such near Relations. But put no Confidence in those, who not only utterly disdain any such Relation to you, but have ever treated you with an implacable hatred, as their most mortal Enemies; unto whom it is impossible they should be reconciled.

Prov. 12. 19, 20. The lips of Truth shall be established for ever: but a lying Tongue is but for a moment.

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal Truly are his delight.

F I N I S.